

# **NEWS RELEASE**

**United States  
Department of  
Agriculture**

**Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service**

*P.O. Box 1458  
220 East Rosser Avenue  
Bismarck, ND 58501*

*Contact:  
Arlene Deutscher  
State Public Affairs Specialist  
(701) 530-2099*

**For Immediate Release**

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## **CONSERVATION PLANNING COURSE COMPLETED FOR TECHNICAL SERVICE PROVIDERS**

Bismarck, ND, September 8, 2003— The 2002 Farm Bill expanded the availability of technical assistance to private landowners by encouraging the use of third parties – called technical service providers (TSPs) – to assist USDA in delivering conservation technical assistance to farmers, ranchers, and others. The premise behind TSPs is that the demand for assistance to do conservation work is increasing and will exceed the current staffing capacity of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and soil conservation districts.

The NDSU Research/Extension Center at Carrington, North Dakota, is where 29 potential TSPs completed a course in Conservation Planning during the week of August 25<sup>th</sup>. The first-of-its-kind course was conducted primarily by the North Dakota NRCS staff with assistance from NDSU Extension Service and the North Dakota State Soil Conservation Committee.

The students were introduced to the basics of conservation planning in the classroom, then went to the field to see how conservation plans were applied on two local farms. Mother Nature did her best to provide plenty of different elements. From wind, to rain, to high temperatures, the students saw it all throughout the week. Working in groups, the students then applied their new information and techniques to inventory soil, water, plant, and animal resources on a third farm which was in need of a conservation plan. The final assignment of

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each group was to develop a conservation plan proposal that if applied to the third farm, would improve the conservation and use of the natural resources present.

Each student then was individually assigned to prepare a conservation plan with a landowner or operator for a farm he/she contracts with and submit it to the NRCS State Conservationist for final approval. Upon approval of this conservation plan, the student will be certified to develop conservation plans for clients.

Students came from Colorado, Wyoming, and North Dakota to participate in the training course. Jerry Miller, a self-employed forester from Sterling, Colorado, stated, “The training was worth every minute.” He added that the most significant aspect for him was gaining knowledge of specifications and regulations, as well as learning what resources are available through NRCS.

Brandon Hoffner, a Pheasants Forever wildlife biologist from Torrington, Wyoming, echoed Miller’s comments. When asked what his expectations of the course were, he said, “At the end of this training, I hope to leave on Friday with a lot of information and be able to write a plan on Monday. I am really impressed with the level of expertise and the quality of the instructors.”

Others noted that they were a little overwhelmed at the highly technical information presented throughout the course but now have a better understanding of how conservation programs work and the importance of conservation planning.

Marvin Nelson stated, “As a North Dakota crop consultant for many years, my goal is to help the landowners the best way I can. This was an excellent process to become more aware of government programs.” He noted that as in anything, liability will be an issue because quality is always in the eye of the beholder. His final thoughts were, “In any new frontier, there will be

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bumps in the road and growing pains but the program will become seamless. Eventually, this means of operation will be the normal way to do things in the future.”

Additional information on technical service provider assistance is available at <http://techreg.usda.gov>. Information on the 2002 Farm Bill can be found at <http://www.usda.gov/farmbill/>.

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*Alan Ness, NRCS State Agronomist, and Steve Sieler, NRCS State Soil Liaison, discuss agronomy and soil resources.*



*Shaun Vickers, NRCS Area Resource Conservationist, leads discussion on rangeland inventory and evaluation.*

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